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ARTICLE III.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART.

BY THE REVEREND JAMES LINDSAY, D.D., IRVINE, SCOTLAND.

ANYTHING like a Philosophy of Art must be taken to be a late product. Long and strange was the sleep of the beautiful after the time of Longinus: not, indeed, until the eighteenth century did the architectonic skill of Baumgarten wake the science of the beautiful by the not very pleasing name of "æsthetics." For it remains the great merit of Baumgarten to have been the first, among modern philosophers, to give systematic treatment to the beautiful in connection with the general conceptions of philosophy. Hence followed, in due course, such great contributions to the philosophy of art as those of Lessing.

So far as early attention had been at all bestowed on art, Plato had tended to lose the beautiful in the good, and to confine art to representation of the good. Plato's efforts towards the purifying of erotic sentiment were of a very mild character. He had no clear realization of the fact that the beautiful and the good belong to different categories — the former emotional, the latter volitional. Plato took the reduced view of art as mere imitation, thus raising what is, no doubt, the first form of art impulse, to the unmerited place of representing the essential nature of art. But Plato had the merit to do great things for the theory of form, especially in the "Philebus" and the "Timæus." The object, it should be said, was supposed by Plato to exist as an "imitation" of the Idea: the

Idea was the intelligible reality of which the object was the appearance. Plato held matter and form to be combined in all things, and that "measure and symmetry" always mark any such combination that is of value. In his theory of form, every species is taken to have a definite normal type—certainly a valid and valuable working hypothesis. Plato further made the provisional conjecture—it can hardly have been more—that the form of a species is determined by law of its own, not by blind or accidental forces. And such a conjectural generalization is proof of the illuminated character of Plato's mind, rough conjecture only though we take it to be.

In Aristotle's "Poetics," his fragmentary theory of the art of poetry sets out from principles of art in general, and he follows in the path of Plato, only that his view of the function of imitation was a higher one. Aristotle still keeps the theory of art in essential relation to the ethical effects of beauty. Plotinus has great honor by his early attempt to frame a metaphysical æsthetic, which he does in his treatise on beauty. The conception of the beautiful—divine "intelligible" beauty—Plotinus first in any real way made independent of the good and the perfect.

But we hasten at once to remark that, since Baumgarten, philosophies of art have been legion—German, British, French, Italian, and Dutch. The celebrated work of Winckelmann freed art from ethical aims, and declared its sole aim to be beauty—beauty of form, idea, and expression. He would have modern art imitate ancient art. A new philosophy of art was struck out by Kant, when he made beauty, objectively, the form of an object perceived apart from thought of its utility; and beauty, subjectively, that which, without use or reasoning, pleases. Schiller closely followed Kant in æsthetic matters. The basis of our æsthetic feeling Kant lays

in our capacity for judging where pleasure obtains without desire. Kant, however, comes short of realizing the sort of constitutive intelligence he is always seeking, with creative, and not merely representative, activities. Schelling exalts art so as to make it the true organon of philosophy, and holds reason to reach its highest only in the activity of the artistic genius. Æsthetic reason is thus the crown of his idealism. Hegel improves on Kant by regarding Art as the manifestation of absolute spirit in the sensuous sphere. The sensuous manifestation—the perfect unity of spirit and form—is only *Schein* or appearance. Such appearance is the sole reality of the beautiful. The beautiful is the external manifestation of the Idea: it is the Idea shining in sensuous form. The unity of form and content as essence of perfect art-work is the fundamental thought of Hegel's *Philosophy of Art*.

It cannot be said that æsthetical theory, even in our own time, has done much more than maintain, in more critical fashion, what is already essentially present in Hegel's æsthetics. The three general forms of art, the symbolic, the classic, and the romantic, are by Hegel connected with the three essential stages through which the spirit of man must pass in its development. In this is noteworthy how Hegel here inwardly connects such concrete thought with the dialectic method. In such a threefold division, there is more of living reality than of the abstract schematism of the dialectic. But Hegel, like Plato long before, fails to perceive how little the manifestation of the absolute in sensuous form can be unmediated—in other words, does not perceive and provide for the absolute and the relative spheres and aspects of art. This, without meaning to say that Hegel does not, in his own way, set the universal conception in immediate connection with its individual or particular appearance.

This leads us up to say, most fittingly, that true philosophy of art must take the idea of absolute being as its point of departure. The ideas of absolute creativeness and absolute beauty immediately follow, however little, as we have just said, they can be carried over in any unmodified form, into the relative sphere. The soul of art lies, doubtless, in its creative spirit — its inventive faculty: joined to this, in art proper, is imitative power. Art, in its free creations, is motived by the sense of beauty. It aims, one may surely say, to master the essence of beauty, not from without, but by continuous study of nature itself in its most perfect forms, and its inner mysterious spirit. The artist — be he a beautiful Raphael or an original Rembrandt, a perfect Titian or a truthful Velasquez, or only a modern apostle of light and atmosphere and movement — opens for us the gates of imaginative charm, of mystery, of power, of illusiveness — above all, of elusive beauty. The true artist must create with joy; the beauty in his work must be an expression of life, of whose immense vitality he is nowise fearful. For beauty is life's perfect flower. And withal, a magical truthfulness must belong to his beauty. Absolute beauty is the ideal in art, but it is an ideal never perfectly attained in human and relative forms of art. Its unrealized ideal is that of the unity of a whole.

Art is sharply distinguished from science by its ideal: science aims to make experience intelligible, art to make it pleasurable: science is abstract, and deals with relations, art is concrete, and requires phenomenal forms. While science leans on such categories as causality and necessity, art depends rather on purposiveness and freedom. Art is, moreover, not confined to that which is, like science, but may freely represent what ought to be. Art is not, like science, common to all, but may serve as vehicle for the transmission

of individual character. It is a spontaneous and necessary product. In what has just been said, it is, of course, not meant that æsthetic enjoyment is independent of knowledge, since the pleasure is the precise result of intelligent knowledge and appreciation. But I agree with those who think that æsthetic perception has in it, from the outset, feeling as well as cognition. It was the view of Schiller, as expressed in his "Philosophical Letters," that, when and so long as we are occupied with beauty, there is no cognition—not even of beauty itself. But it seems quite a mistake to set knowledge or reflection into any kind of antithesis to appreciation. For appreciation must surely have content of some sort, and why should it not be known or described? To know or describe what we appreciate will not rob us of the appreciation, but rather tend to increase it. For only the most perfect appreciation will enable us to approximate perfect knowledge or description. To Schiller belongs the merit to have made higher estimation of the worth of the artistic feeling for the development of humanity, art being for him a means toward the true and the good.

Artistic subjects have been dealt with by Schopenhauer perhaps as finely as by any one in modern times. He follows Plato's conceptions in the main, the ideal theory of the "Philebus" and the "Timæus" finding in Schopenhauer a new form. The world of Schopenhauer consists of matter and form, the blind "will to live" being the ultimate matter. Will—this ultimate matter—objectivizes itself in the world of appearance or "presentation": it objectifies itself in an ascending series of forms which are just, in reality, the ideas of Plato. Will thus objectivizes itself on various planes, each having a beauty of its own. The cosmos in whole is the Idea to which other ideas are related as single notes are in music

to the chord. A higher Idea springs out of the conflict between two lower ideas in their desire for a given matter. The Idea is just the immediate objectivity of the Will on a particular plane: the perception of beauty is ours as we renounce our individuality and contemplate some one of these planes of manifestation of Will. What is most noticeably absent from these positions of Schopenhauer is any explicit equivalent to Plato's insistences on "measure" and "symmetry" as features of any combination of matter and form that carries any worth. The abiding merit of Plato, and, with him, of Schopenhauer and Lotze, has been the real — for Plato, the original and profound — recognition of the Idea as law, not thing. For Lotze has well said that it remains a profoundly mysterious fact that there should be universal laws — anciently "Ideas" — which do not themselves exist as, or like, things, and which yet rule the operations of things. And beauty is, as Goethe said, a manifestation of secret laws of Nature, which else were hid from us. In connection with the ideas of Plato and Schopenhauer just referred to, it may be remarked how, more recently, Pater declared the ideal of all art to be the perfect identity of form and matter, wherein the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression, but "inhere in and completely saturate each other."

But this complete saturation does not keep reflection from having its own perfect work to do in giving such art its exceeding great value for us. That which foredated art's protean forms, that which was first to the great artist, was not any combination of form and color, but the spiritual idea — the ideal conception or construction — and these divine ideas or spiritual conceptions are the last and highest gift which the study of art brings to us. Therefore do we find Schiller

saying, in his "Philosophical Letters" (No. IX.), that the true artist "will take his material, indeed, from the present, but borrow his form from a nobler time, nay, from beyond all time, from the absolute, unchangeable unity of his being. Here, from the pure ether of his divine nature, runs down the fountain of beauty, undefiled by the corruption of races and times, which fret far beneath him in troubled whirlpools."

Taine, in treating of the philosophy of Art, made its end consist in the manifestation of some salient character, or important and essential idea, beyond what is attainable from real objects. Art employs for this end a group or *ensemble* of connected parts, whose relationships she systematically modifies. Superior art, in Taine's view, is that wherein character of the greatest possible worth or force in nature receives from Art all possible increase in value. Ruskin teaches in the most emphatic manner that the greatest Art is just that which conveys the greatest number of the greatest ideas, and that nothing can here atone for the want of truth. To Ruskin, truth and loveliness rest on underlying principles, and the principles are none other than those which are found at the root of virtue and noble character. Frankly, I do not like Ruskin's quantitative standard as to the number of ideas: art is surely a qualitative thing, and the depth of the ideas counts far more than any quantitative enumeration of them. Alike in religion and in art, appeal is to immediacy of feeling, not to abstract conceptions. The ideality of the æsthetic feeling was finely brought out by Schiller, and has, in fact, since his time been the customary expression of the effect of Art. 'Tis this ideal feeling which Art, as representation of life, liberates in us in opposition to the real or actual feeling of life itself. *Einfühlung*, as the Germans have it, is the proper psychological expression for those feelings which,

in art study, we ascribe to another or project into him: it is the sympathetic identification of one's self with the inner life of the objects presented. It is thus very obvious how far short pure imitation or realistic reproduction falls, of the ideality of true art. 'Tis as true of all Art, as Aristotle said it was true of all Poetry, that it is more significant and universal than any copy of matter of fact can be. In Art, of course, where the feeling or passions, in the play of imagination, are not acted out, there is need to guard against possible enervation of the will. But the purification of passion by Art has long ago been taken to prepare the way for virtue.

I have been saying that the spiritual life is creative of the highest art, with its ideal beauty, freedom, unity, and power. And it is, no doubt, true in a sense that art is but the shadow of man. Taine, treating of the philosophy of art, pointed out the need of *original sensation* to the artist, and showed how the faculty of quick and delicate perceptions takes him to the very heart of things, and makes him more clear-sighted than other men. Not the whole of the case is it to say that spiritual life is creative of art: it must be added, as Ruskin would insist, that the revelations of the spiritual world—the world of spiritual beauty—are given to us precisely through the forms and life of the natural world. For art is no lawless thing, but rather, as was once said, the faculty of making imagination productive, according to law. If we take, as significant, the saying of Keats that—

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”

we must remember that the beauty stands for something which is ideal, while the truth is representative of real life. Besides which, there must be no undue or set subordination of art—the expression of truth in sensuous form—to inter-

ests of morality, in which connection Ruskin was apt to fail of doing justice to beauty. Enough surely to say that beauty is immeasurably deepened by the presence of ethical spirit. Art may still be allowed to have worth in itself, form and matter being here inseparable. The didactic theory of Art is often the result of moral extremes, and its shortcomings lie in the fact that it is rather a deduction of what Art should be, than an analysis of facts as they are. Looked at in its historical developments, Art was, when at its highest, of too disinterested a character to be either distinctively moral or intentionally didactic, or specifically hedonistic, pleasurable or even rapturous as such Art may have been. Disinterested as Art may have thus become, it has yet not ceased to be, in some sort, purposive in form. The "interior bond" which "unites art and religion," according to Schelling, may, perhaps, be said to be now so far recognized as to make scientific knowledge of art, if not more needful to a truly religious mind, at least more consonant with it. Beauty is finding equal place with goodness and with truth. Goodness, indeed, was, in Joubert's view, the beginning of beauty. Art is, to our late thought, "the path of the Creator to his work," as Emerson put the matter. Hence the truth of what Athenagoras anciently expressed, that beauty on earth is not self-made, but sent hither by the hand and will of God.

Artistic discipline is a very distinct, positive, and necessary thing, for the beauties of nature are not revealed to us unsought. Art, as social, may teach and elevate, not merely amuse, bewilder, and fascinate; but it does this by no form of continual restraint, effecting its end rather by its own peculiar discipline in the most natural and gracious of ways. Art is, in its appeal, universal. Art judgments, even where the art is national, tend to become universal — no doubt, from

the universality of artistic practice. From being universal, such art judgments easily come to be taken or felt as necessary. The elevating power of art is greatest just when it is most simple and grand. It may be, as was said by Goethe, that art is called art simply because it is not nature; but that does not keep it from being a most natural activity. Art has ever in view — no matter how unconsciously — the steep of moral ascent. The divinations of great art seem to come forth under the unconscious sway of the highest ethical spirit. The necessity for this special cultivation, in order to art appreciation, lies in the fact already insisted upon, that the artist has ideal thoughts which his keener sensibility and deeper insight would lay open to other men. Art, said Browning, "may tell a truth obliquely," and true art will always be suggestive — indeed, infinitely so. Hence the æsthetical theories of the Italian philosopher, Croce, lay stress on the spirit of the artist as that which gives to his art work its value. Art is, to him, concerned with the possible, and the intuition is the thing of primary importance, on which the concept depends. Croce's philosophy of the spirit finds freedom in ethical conditions, not merely in those which are economic. Holding, then, the theory of art, fundamentally conceived, to be pure intuition, Croce maintains this simplicity of art to be its strength. Expression is the actuality of the intuition. The pure intuition is concerned only with states of mind.

Our own position is, then, that the free creative spirit is the very soul of the artist's work, motivated as that is by the sense of æsthetic beauty. The higher movement is instinctive, and there is no compelling of art for morality's sake. There is, so to speak, a background of moral consciousness which, while leaving Art free, insures that the good shall not be sacrificed to beauty. Ideal art never is, but always is to be, and

æsthetic satisfaction is so framed as at once to reflect and to minister towards the developmental whole of personality. There is, indeed, no ideal world but that which is built up through personality; there is no personality but has, for its function, to be sharer, according to capacity, of the creativeness of the ideal; and there is no personality but has the possibility to enrich the world with beauty unforeseen. This complete development of the free conscious life, as the ideal end of Art, has been very well brought out in recent years by Souriau and some other French writers on æsthetics. We may surely say that it is the right and the duty of artistic genius to be true, not only to Nature, but to itself — to its own nature — and, in this double faithfulness, to bring forth and to justify types of art that may be true and universal. For we cannot agree with Guyau, when, in his psychological analysis, he resolves the individual into a purely socialized form. The individual consciousness is, for him, already social, and for him the *I* might as well be *We*. Now, it is surely the office of the highest art to raise the individual above all that pertains to mere particularity, to raise him to the universal, but it would be a fatuous mistake to blur and efface all the lineaments of individuality, and leave us with nothing but a vague, unsifted, undefined sociability. Guyau is, no doubt, right so far as he takes Art to be a personifying or vivifying of what else were not. But some center of reference, or standard of value, must be retained, and, for that reason, the self, in some sort, must be preserved from sociological elimination.

Deeper than our human personality we, in our judgments of beauty, cannot get; and it is to be freely admitted that, just because this is a subjective criterion, and a very relative standard, the objectivity of beauty waits for, and depends upon,

the universality of human appreciation. The development of æsthetic perception is often tardy enough, and the universal acclaim of what is beautiful is accordingly delayed. There is truth in what Balfour has said, that even "in those periods when the movement of Art is most striking, it is dangerous to assume that movement implies progress, if by progress be meant increase in the power to excite æsthetic emotion." That emotion can be excited only as the imagination of the art beholder is active upon the synthesis of manifold elements under some unifying idea. It is dangerous also to give way to the one-sided stress often laid by modern æstheticism on the purely subjective aspects of art or beauty as a psychological phenomenon. We may agree with Croce and others that beauty is no psychic fact, belongs not to things, but rather to man's spiritual energy or activity, but we cannot, for all that, hold to that position in any sense which would render the objectivity of beauty or art a thing of no account—or without real place. There must be qualities or properties metaphysically present in things which render art or beauty objectively existent to our æsthetic perceptions; æsthetical ideals must have their Ground; but this objectivity of beauty or art is not to be conceived in any absolute way, but as relative to a perceiving subject. For we cannot find satisfaction in any theory of that mediate thing of Hartmann and Groos, called semblance or æsthetic appearance, for we do not love self-conscious illusions. No more can we rest in any modern tendency to take feeling as the basal æsthetic category, without also, like Kant, taking account of the intellectual elements or factors involved in our æsthetic judgments, even if pleasure be taken as the end of art. Such æsthetical pleasure may be "the subjective concomitant of the normal amount of activity" in us, but the essence of beauty or art is not thereby

defined for us, or left in anything but what is vague, if not unsweet. There will still be need and scope for synthetic imagination in order to the constituting of a community of life and sympathy between the object and the percipient mind in art study, for the æsthetical Ideal is never fully attained, any more than is any other ideal.

In conclusion, we can lend no countenance to any philosophic tendencies that would exalt æsthetic values above values that are ethical. We have seen how little the freedom of Art requires such a thing. Intuitive perception or beholding we have seen to be a sort of heirloom of art philosophers, from Plato to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Æsthetic feeling or appreciation we have, moreover, seen to exist in fashion that is not devoid of intellectual elements; and such æsthetic feeling or appreciation has been shown implicitly to involve the world's being a system of objective values.